

How to Fix Our Gridlock

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By Sue Doyle

Build monorails. Forget monorails. Double-deck the freeways. Get rid of car-pool lanes.

From Santa Clarita to Studio City, commuters around the region have resoundingly spoken out about what drives them crazy getting around Los Angeles - and how to make it better.

The ideas on how to ease the Southland's persistent bottlenecks come even as a recent state report projects California's population will balloon to 60 million by 2050, further straining already jammed freeways and roads.

But while transit officials grapple with funding issues and dwindling space, nearly 100 readers who outlined their transit visions to the Daily News were quick to target two key areas: public transportation and freeways.

And the short of it is: More, more, more. And speed up the pace between designing projects and building them to save money and to get motorists moving sooner.

"Think of the comprehensive benefits and savings on so many levels if we would get our act together, and do it in five to 10 years," said Steve Carrizosa of Los Angeles. "We could do it!"

Fixes for the region's freeways - many of which are transformed into virtual parking lots during rush hour - drew a lot of readers' attention.

From adding more lanes - including at least one for just buses - to double-decking, adding tolls and lowering speed limits, motorists assailed the Southland's current freeway system.

"Should the FlyAway transit system, and other public transportation systems, have their own lane on the freeways, the majority of us would be delighted to use it and leave our cars parked," said Sylvia Aronica of Arleta.

Others weighed in on double-decking some freeways, and more suggested charging tolls to use roadways to help cover construction and maintenance costs.

Caltrans officials have previously said double-deck freeways would be massively expensive and difficult to engineer in earthquake country.

But the concept of paying tolls to use certain freeway lanes - known as high-occupancy toll lanes - has caught on well in San Diego and Orange County and is an idea that Los

Angeles should consider, said Robert Poole, director of transportation studies at the Reason Foundation.

Under the program, drivers pay a toll that's as high as it needs to be to keep the lanes moving. The lanes provide reliable and quick alternatives for motorists who don't have much time to be stuck in traffic.

"Most people don't use the HOT lanes every day, but they have the security of knowing that if they really do need it, they have the option," Poole said.

Bobbie DeNisi of Los Angeles took the concept of double-decking freeways in another direction with the idea of constructing a two-lane elevated roadway down the center of the San Diego Freeway to the airport.

The roadway would remove all the airport traffic from the regular freeway lanes and could be supported with money from tourism. It could stretch from Sherman Way to Rosecrans Avenue with no exits except the main one at the airport.

"Let (tourists) support the roadways that locals need to use for everyday," DeNisi said. "And let the airport pay for the extra traffic it causes."

Meanwhile, a hefty chunk of readers urged more motorists to get out of their cars and use public transportation.

The result would free up the roads and money that would have been spent for expanding freeways could be spent on other things to improve the community.

Retired engineer Frederick Frey said he uses the Orange and Red lines at least once a week to go downtown from his home in Canoga Park.

But Frey wonders why there aren't more people on board.

"People will spend thousands of dollars to take trips to New York, London and Paris and use the subway to go all around the city," Frey said. "But if you suggest to them that they should try using the Orange or Red lines, they are offended."

Mass transit also could be expanded with more subways, light rail and busways, and some suggested raising the gas tax to \$1 a gallon to help pay for it.

Solo drivers also could be charged for the environmental and economic impact they cause, said Jay Ross of West Los Angeles.

"The key is to understand that building new roads and widening freeways will not solve our traffic problems," Ross said. "You can't build out of traffic."

A number of staunch supporters called for monorails, including one that would wrap around the city and run up to Thousand Oaks.

Naturally, however, there are the critics.

"Forget about monorails," said Matthew Hetz of Los Angeles. "At Disneyland, they are a toy and amusement ride ... and do not work for real-world scenarios."

While a stronger mass-transit system with more people using it would help the region, Poole said that in the end, public transportation will play just a small role in solving the area's troubles.

Coaxing people out of their cars to use a mass-transit system that doesn't always go directly where they need to go - and can take longer - is hard to do, Poole said.

"The big problem is that most people want other people to use transit and not themselves," Poole said.

At the same time, building more freeway lanes and other transportation projects that generate emissions are becoming more difficult because of the impact on air quality, people and communities.

"There's a lot of concern about global warming," said Mark Pisano, executive director of Southern California Association of Governments. "The public needs to understand that with transportation projects that generate capacity and emissions, we'll have a difficult time with them."

Ultimately, amid all of the ideas on how to revamp the region's roads - everything from making Victory Boulevard a one-way route and coordinating more traffic signals - Jean Ross of Mission Hills had what could be the most valuable idea of all.

"Courtesy should be an everyday occurrence for all of us," she said. "Especially on our overcrowded freeways and streets."